

November 21, 2013

Ex Parte Notice
VIA ECFS

The Honorable Thomas Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW 20024
Washington, DC

Re: Connect America Fund, WC Docket No. 10-90; High-Cost Universal Service Support, WC Docket No. 05-337; AT&T Petition to Launch a Proceeding Concerning the TDM-to-IP Transition, GN Docket No. 12-353; Technology Transitions Policy Task Force, GN Docket No. 13-5; In the matter of a National Broadband Plan for Our Future, GN Docket No. 09-51; In the Matter of Federal State Joint Board on Universal Service; Lifeline and Link Up; Universal Service Reform, WC Docket No. 11-42, Concerning the Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans in a Reasonable and Timely Fashion, GN Docket No. 12-228

Dear Chairman Wheeler,

Congratulations on your confirmation to chair the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”). You arrive at the FCC in time to make major decisions that will shape the communications future of rural communities. Today, we write to introduce ourselves and invite you to learn more about our work to help rural people enjoy the full benefits of our advancement in communications.

The Rural Broadband Policy Group is a national coalition of rural advocates who believe that affordable, reliable, and fast Internet service helps rural people participate fully in our nation’s economy, culture, and democracy. Communication is a human right, and without the appropriate tools to communicate, people are left out.

Rural people need broadband to apply for jobs, email their doctor, complete homework, launch a business, call loved ones, and communicate with elected officials. Yet, 14.5 million rural Americans and nearly a third of those living in Tribal lands do not have access to fixed broadband service. As basic services move exclusively to on-line and digital platforms, broadband service becomes a necessity, and policies that guarantee rural people can access and afford reliable communications tools become vital.

Rural people need your leadership and support particularly now that communications providers are implementing significant changes to our communications networks. To borrow from your words, we need to “make sure our values and our technologies are in sync” as these changes unfold.

We want you to know about the importance of maintaining strong regulations that protect rural consumers in the transition to Internet Protocol services. At a time when many states have decided to gut regulations that uphold Universal Service and protect consumers, rural people depend on the leadership of the FCC as a regulator.

We need your voice to help us encourage and defend municipal broadband, allow non-profit, co-op rural providers to apply to Universal Service Fund money, maintain vital consumer protections, uphold our nation's commitment to Universal Service, and invest in rural communities.

Increasing access to affordable communications tools, and creating reliable communications networks that provide quality service in rural areas are essential investments in the well being of rural people and our nation.

We would like for you to consider us allies in making sure that the principle of Universal Service extends to every technology. And, we invite you visit us to learn more about rural communities, issues, and ideas to close the digital divide.

Again, welcome! We look forward to collaborating with you.

Sincerely,



Edyael Casaperalta
Coordinator, Rural Broadband Policy Group
Center for Rural Strategies

Members of the Rural Broadband Policy Group:

Access Humboldt, Eureka, California
Akakū: Maui Community Television, Kahului Hawai'i
Appalshop, Whitesburg, Kentucky
California Center for Rural Policy, Humboldt State University, California
Center for Media Justice, Oakland, California
Center for Rural Strategies, Whitesburg, Kentucky
Central Appalachia Regional Network
Main Street Project, Minneapolis, Minnesota
National Rural Education Association, West Lafayette, Indiana
Partnership of African American Churches, Institute, West Virginia
Virginia Rural Health Association, Blacksburg, Virginia
Virginia Rural Health Resource Center, Blacksburg, Virginia
West Virginia Community Development Hub, Fairmont, West Virginia

For more information, please contact: Edyael Casaperalta at edyael@ruralstrategies.org
Visit us at: <http://www.ruralstrategies.org/rural-broadband-policy-group>